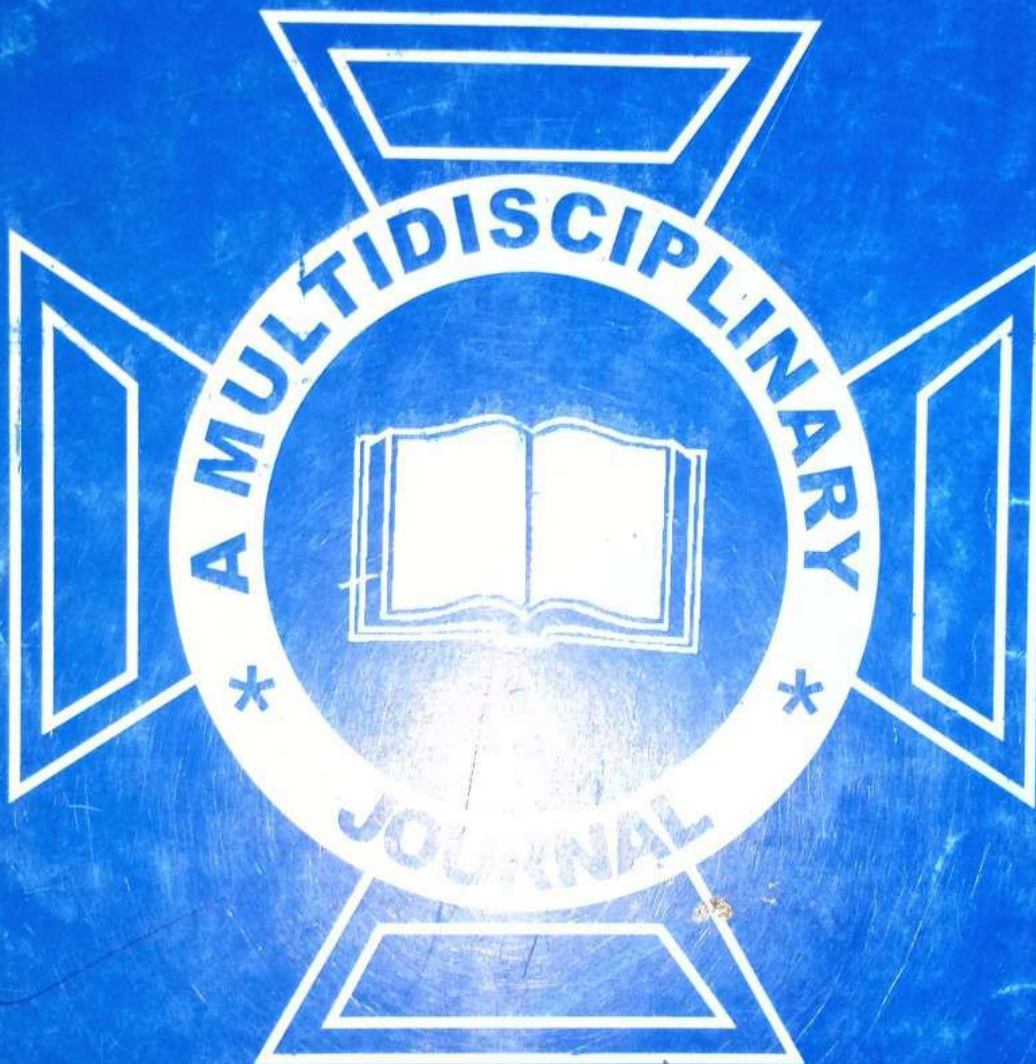


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Abstract

Languages differ grammatically and the differences in languages most often inhibit the learning of a target language by non-native speakers. This is true of English Language in relation to most of our local languages in Nigeria. There are obvious syntactic, phonological and semantic differences between these languages which cannot be ignored if the teaching and learning of the target language is to take place effectively. This is because most of these differences constitute problems to learners of the language. This paper takes a critical look at passivization of sentences that is, from active to passive voice. It shows the importance of passive sentences in English language, looks at the different passive tenses and explains why second language learners find it difficult to make passive constructions in declarative, negative and interrogative constructions. Finally, the paper offers worthwhile suggestions for improvement of the problems highlighted.

Introduction

English sentences have two main voices, the active and passive. Passivization can be defined as a process of changing a sentence from active voice to the passive voice. A sentence is said to be in the active voice if its subject performs the action in it on the object. In other words, for a sentence to be changed to passive, there must be an object which becomes the subject in the passive voice. The process of changing a sentence from active to passive is usually a problem to learners of English as a second language. However, attention has not been paid to this problem by teachers, researchers and curriculum planners. Also, the problem of passivization or of using the passive voice in English is not peculiar to only students at secondary or tertiary institutions but also to learned adults in their day-to-day use of English language. Many users of English language do not know the different types of passive constructions in English neither do they know how to change correctly a sentence from active to passive. They also lack the knowledge of the situation under which the passive voice should be used. This paper therefore, wishes to enlighten English as a second language learners on how to understand and use passive constructions correctly in English language. This would ensure an all-round effective communication in English. This is because, passives in English constitute the dominant structure for the description of processes. They are also used to report scientific experiments in pure and applied sciences and since Nigerian educational system now emphasizes on Science and Technology the knowledge and understanding of the passive is of immense importance.

Importance of the Passive Voice

This passive voice as stated earlier is of great importance to English as a second language speakers. It is used always in English to express ideas that demand reflexive or impersonal construction to make some unpleasant statements or when we want to avoid mentioning the doer of an action. For example:

1. The coup plotters have been executed.
2. The price of the fuel has been increased again.

In the sentences above, the doers of the actions are not stated because the emphasis is on the receivers of the actions. Therefore, even if the actions in the sentence are not favourable to the readers or listeners, there is no named doer of the action to be held responsible for the act. Thomson and Martinet (1980:354) also added that, "the general principle governing the use of passive voice is that, when the main interest of the speaker or writer is on the very activity itself rather than on the active subject, there is a desire to use the idea first. For example, 'People speak Nupe all over Niger State'. Too much weight is given to the vague subject (people) when the main concern is the speaking of Nupe. The passive voice puts the idea in a much better perspective as 'Nupe is spoken all over Niger State'. The agent 'people' is unimportant.

Moreover, the passive voice is used when the active form involves the use of an indefinite or vague pronoun or noun as subject. Quirk and Greenberg (1973) refer to such vague subjects to include i, we, you they, one, someone, nobody, people, a man, a boy etc. These subjects are very seldom worth mentioning in the passive construction and therefore 'by' insertion is not necessary. For example,

Someone has fed me	-	(Active)
I have been fed.	-	(Passive)
The man has punished her	-	(Active)
She has been punished	-	(Passive)

Another good use of the passive according to Allen (1975), is found more usually in the written than in speech as a device to avoid awkward change of the subject of a clause sentence as in: He spoke at great length; People asked many questions at the end, which he answered satisfactorily. This is more concisely expressed with the help of the passive voice as, "He spoke at great length, was asked many questions at the end and answered satisfactorily". This gives a more straightforward construction.

The passive voice is also used to give scientific reports and in objective expository writings. All these are necessary for our Science and Technology students and teachers.

Passivization in English Language

Passivization in English Language grammar is a process of changing a sentence from active voice to passive voice. This process, according to grammarians like Thomson and Martinet (1980); Quirk and Greenbaum (1973), involves putting the verb 'to be' into the same tense as the active and adding the past participle of the active verb. This also involves transposition of the subject and that of the object. For example:

NP1	V	NP2	
Audu	killed	the lion	(Active)
Subject	Verb	Object	
NP2	Verb (Past)	NP1	
The lion	was	killed by Audu	(Passive)
Object	'to be'	past participle	subject

The above shows that, the SVO sentence pattern in the active voice changes to OVS in the passive. This is because the subject and object have swapped their positions.

For an active sentence to be transformed to the passive appropriately, Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) provided the following conditions:

1. The tense of the active sentence must be maintained in the passive.
2. The position of the subject changes to that of the object. However, in contexts where the subject or performer is not important, it is not mentioned but the object still takes its new position.
John has done the job (active)
The job has been done 'O' (passive)
3. The appropriate form of verb 'to be' has to be used. The verb 'to be' include: been, is, was, were, are, being, be.
4. Only the past participle form of the active verb should be used.

Moreover, speaking on the conditions guiding passivization, Thomson and Martinet (1980) and Allen (1975) added the following:

- a. That only active sentences with object can be changed to passive sentences. For instance, an active sentence like, 'The shooting of the lion was good' cannot be passivized. Thus it lacks an object.
- b. Passive transformation is blocked where there is co-reference between subject and object i.e. when there are reflexive reciprocal, or possessive pronouns in the noun phrase as object. For example,
Halima could see [Paul] in the mirror.

[herself]

It is only correct to have the passive,
Paul could be seen in the mirror and wrong to say Herself could be seen in the mirror.

In the same way while the active "we could hardly see each other in the party", is correct, the passive.

Each other could hardly be seen in the party is incorrect.

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973) also added that even though transitive verbs allow passivization, a small group of this class does not allow it. This group includes verbs such as have, measure, resemble, lack, comprise, suit, fit, equal, like etc. For example:

S V O

They have a nice house (Active)

It is wrong to say "A nice house is have by them" in the passive voice. Other examples include: Amina resembles her father. This dress becomes yours, etc.

This intricate nature of passivization in English makes it difficult for ESL learners.

Types of Passives in English

English Language is said to have eleven different passive tenses Thomson and Martinet (1980), Quirk & Greenbaum (1973). This paper will take a look at each of the tenses through declarative, negative and interrogative constructions. The same sentence would be taken through all the tenses for a better understanding of the subject matter.

1. The present Continuous Passive

This passive is formed by the present continuous form of 'to be' which is represented by 'is being' and the past participle form of the verb. This can be seen in the followings.

S V O A

Active: They are taking her away

Declarative: She is being taken away

Negative: She is not being taken away

Interrogative: Why/when is she being taken away?

However, only the past and present continuous tenses are used in the passive which according to Thomson and Martinet (1980) makes it difficult. Other continuous tenses such as perfect and future tenses are rarely used in the passive. For instance the following sentences cannot be changed to the passive.

They have/had been doing the job

They will/would be doing the job

2. The present Simple Passive

This is formed by 'is' or 'are' and the past participle form of the main verb. E.g.

S V O A

Active: They take her away

Active: He takes her away

Passive

Declarative: She is taken away

Negative: She is not taken away

Interrogative: Why/when is she taken away?

3. Past Continuous Passive

This is composed of 'was' or 'were' and being and the past participle of the main verb.

Example

S V O A

Active: They were taking her away

Active: He was taking her away

Passive

Declarative: She was being taken away

Negative: She was not being taken away

Interrogative: Why/when was she being taken away?

4. Past Simple Passive

This consists of was/were and the past participle e.g.

S V O A

Active: They took her away

Passive

Declarative: She was taken away

Negative: She was not taken away

Interrogative: Why/when was she taken away?

5. Present Perfect Passive

This involves has or have and the past participle e.g.

S V O A

Active: They have taken her away or

He has taken her away

Passive

Declarative: She has been taken away

Negative: She has not been taken away

Interrogative: Why/when has she been taken away?

Or

Declarative: I have been taken away

Negative: I have not been taken away

Interrogative: Why/when have I been taken away?

6. Past Perfect Passive

This is formed by had + been and the past participle form of the verb. E.g. the Active sentence

They had taken her away

She had taken her away

We had taken her away

It had taken her away

He had taken her away

You had taken her away

Passive

Declarative: She had been taken away

He had been taken away

We had been taken away

It had been taken away

You had been taken away

I had been taken away

They had been taken away

Negative: She had not been taken away

Interrogative: Why/when had she not been taken away?

7. The Perfect Conditional Passive

This is formed by would/should and have and been and the past participle form of the main verb. E.g.

S V O A

Active: They would/should have taken her away

Passive

Declarative: She would/should have been taken away

Negative: She would/should not have been taken away

Interrogative: Why/when would/should she been taken away?

Similar passives may be formed using could, might, ought etc.

8. **The Future Passive**

This requires will/shall and be and past participle form of the verb. For example,

Active: They will take her away, produces the passive

Declarative: She will be taken away

Negative: She will not be taken away

Interrogative: Why/when will she be taken away?

Similar tenses may be formed using can, may and must.

9. **The Future Perfect Passive**

This includes shall/will and have and been and the past participle of the verb. For example,

Active: They will have taken her away, gives the passive

Declarative: She will have been taken away

Negative: She will not have been taken away

Interrogative: Why/when will she have been taken away?

10. **Conditional Passive**

This is formed by the verbs would/should and be followed by the past participle of the main verb. For example,

Active: They would/should take her away, gives the passive

Declarative: She would/should be taken away

Negative: She would/should not be taken away

Interrogative: Why/when would/should she be taken away?

11. **Present Infinitive Passive**

This involves the use of 'to' followed by infinitive e.g.

Active: They are to take her away, produces the passive

Declarative: She is to be taken away

Negative: She is not to be taken away

Interrogative: Why/when is she to be taken away?

Why Passivization is a problem to ESL Learners

Passivization is a problem to ESL learners because such intricate nature of transformation does not exist in most second languages. Most of our languages only have the active voice. Moreover, the transposition of subject and object in the passive sentence does not obtain in our languages. For instance, in a sentence 'the food has been eaten by me', which is a present perfect passive the only equivalent in the active voice is 'I have eaten the food'. Any attempt to force this sentence into the passive would result in an interrogative construction in the 1st language and this interrogation would also not depict the tense of the active sentence. That is, it might change from present perfect passive (declarative) to past perfect interrogative. This is illustrated in Nupe language as thus,

Present Perfect Active

I have eaten the food

I have food eat past

Nupe: Mi a Yangichi gi ani

Present Perfect Passive

The food has been eaten

Nupe: Yangichi a de gigi ani?

Food has got eating past?

The situation above does not only show awkward transformation to the passive but also depicts lack of concord and negligence of the article (the) in Nupe in the transformed constructions.

The second reason why passivization is a problem to ESL learner is that the past participle form of verbs used in passive sentences does not exist in most of our languages. Our local languages only have the simple past equivalent which are also not inflected as in English. In many of our L1, a letter or word distinctly separated from the main verb is used to indicate past form. This therefore makes passivization a problem to ESL learners.

Moreover, most of our students are taught and only have the knowledge of limited past participle form of verbs and this makes it difficult for them to passive. Furthermore, most of our teachers rarely use passive constructions in class or elsewhere even in situations where they are necessary. Most of them avoid it because they are not sure of how to use it and are afraid of making mistakes. This therefore makes it difficult for students particularly at secondary school level to understand it.

However, the causes of the problems highlighted notwithstanding, passivization cannot be ignored in the teaching and learning of English as a second language because of its immense importance particularly in view of the society's urge for scientific and technological advancement. We need passive sentences in our students' essays and other forms of write-up for the sake of variety and academic competence.

Recommendations

This paper cannot be concluded without giving suggestions, which would minimize the problems associated with the teaching and learning of passivization in English Language, by ESL learners. The following are the suggested recommendations:

1. Researchers, curriculum planners and teachers should generally adequately address areas where students are likely to have problems in learning English as a second language. Thereafter, provision should be made for re-teaching and re-learning over and over again to ensure students' mastery in such problem areas.
2. Secondly, transformation of verbs from simple past to past participle forms should be taught together.
3. Thirdly, students could be given sentences in active voice and be asked to transform them to the passive using the correct verb forms as well as ensure agreement between the words. These sentences should later be changed from declarative to negative and interrogative constructions.
4. Moreover, passages and compositions could be given to students to identify the passive forms orally or in writing. This would make the types of passive familiar to them.
5. Furthermore, the existing English language textbooks should provide needed and enough drills to enhance proper understanding by the students. Through pattern drilling and exposure to the basic structures of English, the teacher can lead his students to automatic control of the framework of the target language. The more students are exposed to a language item, the more they remember it. This will also help to minimize the problem of rule over generalization and negative interference of the first language.
6. Students should also be encouraged to have access to many reading materials both in art and science as well as inside and outside the school environment. They should be given class and homework in form of writing compositions, lectures, reading, stories, novels, narrating experiences, reporting scenes etc. This is because the more exposed they are to the language, the more proficient they become in it.
7. Moreover, substitutions tables could also be used to teach all types of passive sentences in the declarative e.g.

Subject	Verb	Object
My friend	has eaten	the food
Agnes	had eaten	the meat
He	is given	the bread
	was shown	

Students could generate correct passive sentences orally and in writing from substitution tables like the one given above.

Finally, essay topics such as

- a. How gari is made
- b. How a mother would have prepared for her daughter's wedding
- c. How fire is made, etc.

should be given to the students to expose them to the passive voice.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a critical look at one of the areas which learners of English as a second language find difficult to learn and understand. It looked at passivization its roles in English language and the different passive tenses. The declarative, negative and interrogative constructions of these passives were looked at in order to expose the learners to their different functions. Also, the specific areas which are likely to constitute problems to learners were highlighted and suggestions as well as appropriate remedial exercises were offered to minimize the impact of the problems. It is therefore hoped that more researches would be conducted to highlight and proffer solutions to areas where learners of English are likely to have problems with its learning. This would help to facilitate the effective teaching and learning of English as a second language.

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